



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 July 2025

by T Burnham BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20TH August 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3358120

Land to the West of New Road, Ruscombe, Twyford RG10 9LN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by LNT Care Developments against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 240990.
 - The development proposed is erection of a two storey building to form a 66 no. bedroom care home for older people with parking, access, landscaping and associated ground works, following demolition of the existing buildings/structures.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The application was originally refused by the Council on the basis of five grounds. Three of those grounds related to the absence of a completed planning obligation covering opportunities for training, apprenticeships and other vocational initiatives, sustainable travel improvements and biodiversity net gain monitoring. However, reasons for refusal relating to those matters have been withdrawn by the Council following the completion of a planning obligation under S106. Further, there are no longer concerns relating to great crested newts around which a further refusal reason was formed. I shall not therefore consider reasons for refusal 2-5 further.

Main Issue

3. On that basis, the main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area with particular regard to the effect of the proposal on the street scene.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is a former plant nursery within Ruscombe adjacent to New Road and is allocated for housing within the Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan (2024). The site has been redundant for a number of years and I noted the very poor condition of the existing structures on site on my visit, particularly with regard to the shattered and decaying glasshouses which occupy a large proportion of the site.
5. The character of the area is low density residential, with gaps between properties which range in design and scale from bungalows through to two storey dwellings. Their set offs from each other often allow views between them which often afford the area an open and spacious appearance, which aids the transition from the more suburban areas to the west to the countryside to the east. There are two

established general building lines fronting New Road to either side of the site. Properties on and the entrance to Walnut Tree Close sit to the north.

6. The care home would be formed of two linked blocks of similar design. The forwardmost of those blocks would front onto New Road and would span the majority of the width of the site. Whilst the design appears to have been amended to incorporate hipped roofs, the ridgeline of the main buildings would be continuous and set 2m higher than the nearby tallest properties.
7. The two storey feature to the centre of the front façade would have only a slight forward projection and a limited projection above the eaves level. The very small projecting two storey features on the side of the block would be visually lost as features which could serve to break up the bulk and mass of the building, given their limited height, width and projection.
8. Despite the proposed use of alternating materials and the set back from New Road, the main façade of the building fronting New Road would offer little visual relief on what would be a building of substantial bulk and mass.
9. The largely unbroken form of the building on the site along with its height and width would severely restrict through views at the site and along with its substantial bulk and mass, would mean that it would contrast sharply with the surrounding form of development.
10. It would not adopt either of the existing building lines and this would only serve to add a sense of visual difference to the building within the street scene. Further, the building by reason of its bulk, mass and limited articulation would afford it a commercial appearance, which would contrast sharply with the broadly established residential appearance of the area.
11. To conclude on the main issue, for the above reasons, the proposal would significantly detract from the street scene and would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area.
12. I note that there are proposals for hedgerow planting to the front of the site, however this would be likely to take some time to mature and the building would remain visible from the street through the wide central access point in any event when any planting had matured.
13. The proposal would therefore conflict with policies CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Core Strategy (2010) (CS). Amongst other things these policies state that planning permission will be granted for proposals that maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment and which are of an appropriate mass, built form, height and character to the area with a high quality of design.
14. There would also be conflict with the Borough Design Guide¹ at R7 which advises that for each street, building frontages must define the street space with a coherent building line that relates to existing building lines where they form a positive characteristic of the area. There would be further conflict with R11 which advises that new housing should be designed to create street scenes with a coherent character, that relates well to, or enhances, existing street scenes including with reference to scale and height in areas where built form contributes significantly to the local character.

¹ Wokingham Borough Council Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document June 2012.

15. The National Design Guide² (NDG) advises that well designed development should amongst other things respond positively to the positive elements of the local character including form which encompasses height, bulk and massing. However, the proposal fails to respond positively to local identity and context which form two of the ten characteristics that contribute to well-designed places. The proposal is therefore in conflict with the NDG.
16. There would also be conflict with the Framework on design grounds which states at Paragraph 139 that development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design. The government guidance on design includes the NDG.

Other Matters

17. My attention has been drawn to three schemes including two appeal decisions³. The first relates to retirement apartments at London Road, a short distance from the site and I was able to view that scheme on my site visit. However, that scheme offers no support in favour of the proposal before me as it is reflective of nearby building lines and includes substantial articulation to its front elevation to the road.
18. I have also been supplied with some details including an appeal decision relating to a proposal for a care home at Oak Dale, Lower Wokingham Road, Crowthorne and for a proposal relating to a care home at Evendons Lane, Wokingham.
19. Whilst there do appear to be some similarities in scale of development between those schemes and that before me, given the limited information presented surrounding the exact design, siting and context of those schemes, I cannot afford them anything more than limited weight.
20. I note that the appellant is displeased with the manner in which the Council has argued its case. That is however a matter to be resolved between the Council and the appellant.
21. The appellant has questioned the applicability of the Design Guide; however, it includes references to flats which are a similar form of development to that before me. I therefore consider the Design Guide to be applicable to a care home.
22. A completed planning obligation under S106 has been submitted. The obligation includes provisions for biodiversity net gain and monitoring along with an employment skills contribution and travel plan.
23. That the provisions of the planning obligation before me are necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms, are directly related to the development and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development is not in dispute between the parties. I have no reason to conclude otherwise and they meet the relevant tests⁴.

Planning Balance

24. The Council does not have a 5 year supply of housing land (5YRHLS) with the 5YRHLS position identified by the Council at 3.2 years. However, this figure comes

² National Design Guide – Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places – Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government January 2021.

³ Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/17/3170553 – London Road & APP/X0360/W/23/3336000 – Oak Dale, Lower Wokingham Road.

⁴ Contained within Paragraph 58 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024.

from the committee report of October 2024 and may not be reflective of the up to date position which may be lesser than that figure. Nonetheless, Paragraph 11d) of the Framework is of relevance. Paragraph 11d) i) is not relevant in this case.

25. In the context of a considerable shortfall of 5YRHLS the provision of a modern and purpose built 66 bedroom care home (identified within the evidence as 37 dwellings equivalent) capable of delivering up to date care within a modern environment which would make a notable contribution to the housing supply within an area where it is agreed there is a need for such development (including the critical need identified within PPG⁵) is afforded significant weight.
26. The proposal would resolve the problem of an untidy site and reduce and consolidate the existing footprint of decaying buildings on the site. A good amount of green space would be retained on the site to the rear. Employment opportunities would be created. I afford these matters moderate weight.
27. The provision of the standard 10% biodiversity net gain and monitoring along with an employment skills contribution/plan and travel plan/monitoring are afforded limited weight.
28. However, the proposal would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area with particular regard to the effect of the proposal on the street scene. There would be conflict with policies CP1 and CP3 of the CS and the Borough Design Guide. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole. There would also be conflict with the NDG and the Framework with regard to the design of the proposal. One of the key requirements of the Framework is to achieve well-designed places. These conflicts are afforded substantial weight.
29. Consequently, even if there were a substantially greater shortfall in the 5YRHLS than detailed within the evidence, the adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. This is having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, not all of which the proposal would support.
30. Material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan with which the proposal would conflict.

Conclusion

31. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

T Burnham

INSPECTOR

⁵ Gov.uk Guidance, Housing for older and disabled people 2019, Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 63-001-20190626.